

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002088

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, PRM, EAP/BCLTV. GENEVA FOR RMA. HQ  
USPACOM FOR FPA (HUSO)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2015

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#) [BM](#) [BURMA](#)

SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH THAI NSC SECRETARY  
GENERAL WINAI

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary. Thai National Security Council Secretary General Winai told the Ambassador on March 21 that after two postponements of the original August 2004 deadline for the move of the urban Burmese to the border camps, there would be no further extensions of the current deadline of March 31. Only a small percentage of the urban Burmese have registered so far for the camp transfer. The Ambassador emphasized U.S. concern about the camp move and expressed hope that there would be no general crackdown on urban Burmese who did not register, and particularly no refoulement of urban Burmese refugees. Winai said the RTG was not planning any crackdown or searches for urban Burmese but Thai immigration law would be applied to those who were detained by Thai authorities. The Ambassador noted U.S. interest in further discussions with the RTG on refugee resettlement from the Burma border camps and the planned April visit of PRM DAS Ryan in which this issue could be explored further. Winai welcomed the news of Ryan's visit and said the RTG was open to resettlement from the camps. Winai also described the evolution in the RTG's assessment of the violence in southern Thailand. The RTG had not initially understood the situation and that real sensitivities and grievances existed which needed addressing. The RTG believed the strategy of those behind the violence was to separate the people from the government and internationalize the issue. The latter and the possibility that the southern situation would become a religious conflict were what the RTG feared most. At the conclusion of the meeting, Winai told the Ambassador that he did not expect to remain long in his position. End Summary.

12. (C) On March 21, Ambassador called on General Winai Phattiyakul, Thai National Security Council Secretary General, and raised refugee issues and the situation in southern Thailand.

-----  
Urban Burmese Refugee Issue  
-----

13. (C) General Winai began the discussion by expressing Thai gratitude for the U.S. resettlement programs for the Hmong and urban Burmese. Winai noted that both groups were in a difficult situation and had few opportunities in Thailand. The urban Burmese in particular faced an uncertain future. It was unclear whether there would be positive political developments in Burma that would allow them to return there. Winai said that some in the group were driven by political principles and were involved in political activities. Others were engaged in criminal activities. Thailand had to exert some control over them. The Ambassador replied that the Hmong resettlement program had been delayed by a disease outbreak that would delay the completion of the program for several months. He asked General Winai to explain the background of the urban Burmese situation and the current plan to move them to the border camps.

14. (C) Winai recounted that political demonstrations in mid-2003 by urban Burmese outside the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok, which criticized Thai and Burmese government policies had led Prime Minister Thaksin to direct that the urban Burmese be moved to the border camps by August 2004 and not engage in political activities. Winai added that the Prime Minister had also accused UNHCR at the time of conducting refugee status interviews for this group without informing the Thai government. (Comment. UNHCR had in fact regularly kept the Thai Foreign Ministry apprised of its refugee interview activities. End comment.) The Thai government had decided also that the urban Burmese could choose resettlement to third countries. UNHCR had not contested the Thai government position. Winai continued that the United States had then stepped in and offered to resettle the urban Burmese. As August 2004 approached, the United States and UNHCR had asked for an extension of the deadline for the border camp move. The RTG had agreed to this and also to a subsequent request to postpone the deadline to the end of March 2005. Over this period the number of urban Burmese whom UNHCR said had refugee status had increased from about 1,800 to about 4,400. Resettlement countries had taken so far about 2,000 of the 4,400.

15. (C) Winai said that there could not be further extensions of the March 31 deadline. He added that there was space for 1,800 persons in three of the refugee camps near the Thai-Burma border. To ensure there was enough room in the camps, the urban Burmese could be staged into the camps according to their position in the resettlement pipeline. That is, those who had been refused by resettlement countries should be moved first and those who had appealed a negative decision by a resettlement country could be moved next. Those who already had a date for departure to a third country should be the last to move to the camps. Winai noted that only a small number of urban Burmese in Bangkok had registered so far for the camp transfer. The number in Mae Sot was about 400. UNHCR had told the urban Burmese that they would lose their right to resettlement if they did not report for the transfer. Resettlement countries would be able to continue processing of the urban Burmese after they went to the camps.

16. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that there was serious concern among NGOs and in the U.S. Congress about the planned move. He added that some of the refugees had worries about camp conditions. Others might have medical or security problems if they moved to the camps. The Ambassador said that the U.S. hoped that there would not be a strong RTG reaction against those urban Burmese who did not register for the camp transfer. In particular the United States opposed any refoulement of refugees.

17. (C) Winai responded that, &frankly,<sup>8</sup> the RTG was not planning a general crackdown or large-scale searches for the urban Burmese after the March 31 deadline passed. However, the urban Burmese would be subject to Thai immigration law after March 31. He added that the Thai government had not formally deported refugees to the Burmese authorities, but acknowledged that some were taken to the Burma border and released there, whereupon they typically returned to Thailand.

-----  
Burma Refugee Camp Resettlement  
-----

18. (C) The Ambassador said that the U.S. was interested in resettlement of refugees from the Burma border camps. As a start, the U.S. wanted to look at the Tham Hin refugee camp. Resettlement from that site could begin towards the end of this year. He noted that PRM DAS Kelly Ryan would be visiting Thailand April 20-22 and would have more to say on this issue.

19. (C) Winai responded that he looked forward to Ryan's visit. He said that the situation in Tham Hin was not good and the refugees there had little opportunity to develop themselves. Many had been in the camps for 20 years. The best alternative would be if they had an opportunity to return to Burma. Winai described how a recent Thai military delegation to Rangoon had raised this issue and Burmese leader Maung Aye had said that the Burmese government, in a policy shift, was now willing to issue passports to Burmese workers who returned to Burma from Thailand so they in turn could come back to Thailand under the Thai migrant worker registration program. Winai said this statement by Maung Aye would have to be pursued further to determine if it represented a real change. Maung Aye had also said Rangoon was willing to accept back to Burma those who had left because they were fleeing fighting. However, Rangoon was not willing to permit those Burmese who rebelled against the government to return. Winai said that it was not clear what distinction there was between the second and third groups.

110. (C) Winai said that when he first took the position of NSC Secretary General, there had been concern in the RTG that any resettlement program from the border camps would be a pull factor and draw more Burmese into Thailand. Now, however, there was little fighting in eastern Burma and so concerns in this area had lessened. The RTG, including the Prime Minister, was agreeable to resettlement from the border camps. Winai said it was important now also for the camp refugees to have greater educational and vocational training opportunities. This would give them skills that they could use if they were able to return to Burma. If, on the other hand, they stayed in Thailand and became Thai, they could make a contribution to Thai society.

-----  
Situation in the South  
-----

111. (C) Winai said that the RTG's views about the situation in southern Thailand had changed over the past two years. Initially, the RTG had thought that the perpetrators of the violence were bandits, criminals involved in illegal activities, or influential local persons who had differences with Thai officials. The RTG also believed that some in the South, particularly the younger generation, still had notions

of separatism, but did not have the means to put such ideas into action. Later, the RTG realized the situation was more complex and that some Southerners felt that Thai society and Thai officials did not treat them justly. These feelings were genuine, different from the feelings of other Thai. Southerners were very sensitive on this point. The RTG also discovered that the Ministry of Education had little knowledge about the teachers and curriculum in the Muslim schools in the South. It learned that many Thai students were going to schools in Indonesia. The Indonesian government had asked for the Thai government's assistance in tracking the movements of these students.

12. (C) Winai said those behind the southern violence wanted to separate the people from the government, draw foreign attention to the situation, and internationalize the issue. The RTG feared most that the situation would become a religious conflict and become internationalized. Winai noted that it was not yet clear what role the newly formed National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) headed by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun would play. He thought it would try to identify legitimate grievances and what could be done to address them.

13. (C) The Ambassador said that as a friend of Thailand, he was concerned about the situation in the South. He understood the issue of the sensitivity of Muslim feelings based on his experience in Indonesia. The Ambassador said there seemed to be disagreement on whether the disbanding several years earlier by Prime Minister Thaksin of the long-standing commission of military, police, officials and southern civilians that had addressed general problems in the region was a mistake and contributed to the current instability. Winai responded that he felt the old commission had played a useful role. However, the Prime Minister at the time had been told that law enforcement officials could handle the situation and that the number of persons with guns in the South totaled no more than 50. In addition, the three southern provinces were a part of Thailand and should not necessarily be treated or governed differently from the rest of the country. Winai added that the problems in the South had ebbed and flowed for about 100 years.

14. (C) Winai said that the new RTG approach would be to accept that there were cultural differences with the South. These differences should be looked at as an asset. Southerners would also have full religious freedom. However, there would be no special autonomy. The RTG was now giving Southerners special preferences in the test for entering the police force since they would otherwise not pass. Many of the 1,900 new police hired for the South would be from the region. The Ministry of Education would also take a much more active role in improving the curriculum in the Islamic schools. The schools currently did not teach regular subjects and this made it difficult for graduates to obtain jobs. Winai stated that senior southern religious leaders had recently met with the RTG and said that they wanted a return to normalcy. They asked the RTG to improve security in the South and said that most southerners wanted peace.

15. (C) In an aside to the Ambassador at the conclusion of the meeting, General Winai said that he did not expect to remain long in his current position. He hoped to return to the military and retire from there.

16. (C) Comment. Winai's comment that there are no plans for a general crackdown on urban Burmese after the March 31 deadline is positive, but Embassy will watch this issue carefully. UNHCR and the RTG are now working feverishly to put in place the necessary logistical arrangements for the camp transfer. While some arrangements have been made already, whether they will be sufficient will likely depend on how many of the urban Burmese sign up for the camp move and the pace of the movements.

BOYCE